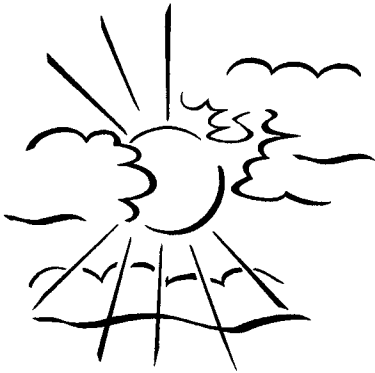


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\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Thursday, June 23, 2005**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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# Lawmakers eye recouping cost of workers on Medicaid

Wednesday, June 22, 2005

By Sharon Emery Lansing Bureau

LANSING - Fed up with the nagging suspicion that some employers are using Medicaid to pick up the tab for their workers' health care -- and armed with a new report -- three House Democrats are looking to recoup \$75 million of the taxpayers' money.

Reps. Alma Wheeler Smith of Salem, Michael Sak of Grand Rapids and Gretchen Whitmer of East Lansing want to levy a surcharge equal to what it costs the state to provide Medicaid to full-time employees at companies with more than 50 workers.

They were to unveil a three-bill package this morning that would amend the Single Business Tax to do that.

"We've heard lots of talk in the community about employers not providing health care for full-time employees and paying wages so low that workers qualify for Medicaid," Smith said.

So as to avoid the rumor mill, Smith says she went straight to the state to provide the information.

The report compiled by the Michigan Department of Human Services shows that more than 300 companies had at least 10 percent of their work force on Medicaid during the October-December 2004 period reviewed, Smith said. She called \$75 million a conservative estimate of what could be recovered.

Medicaid caseloads have ballooned by more than 30 percent -- to 1.4 million Michigan residents -- during a half-decade of chronic job loss since 2000. One of every seven Michigan residents is now served by the \$7.5 billion state-federal system.

Workers at just 55 companies accounted for 20 percent of all employed people receiving taxpayer-funded health care in Michigan, the report released today shows.

While just 3.47 percent of workers at the 180,597 companies included were on Medicaid, the percentage among the 55 companies was more than three times that, hovering close to 12 percent. The report did not determine whether employees were working full or part time.

Rob Fowler, president and CEO of the Small Business Association of Michigan, said many businesses are simply not in a position to provide extensive benefits.

"As much as they would like to pay higher wages and offer benefits, the economics of their business don't allow it," Fowler said.

To help balance the state budget, Republicans have proposed cutting Medicaid costs by requiring recipients to pay premiums and co-pays, and eliminating coverage for 19- and 20-year-olds, as well as adults who care for children already served by the program.

Democratic legislators and advocates for the poor say there has to be a better way.

"This just brings home the fact that some employers aren't carrying the appropriate amount of weight in terms of providing benefits," said Jackie Doig, of the Center for Civil Justice in Saginaw. "They're getting off scot free."

Generally speaking a working adult in a family of three would have to be earning less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$8,045, to qualify for Medicaid, said Steve Fitton, director of Medicaid policy and actuarial services in the Department of Community Health.

Children of workers can qualify if their parent earns more, however. Most children 18 and younger are eligible for Medicaid up to 150 percent of poverty, or about \$24,135 for a family of three, Fitton said.

Beyond that, the MiChild program is available for children who don't qualify for Medicaid but are in families earning less than \$32,180.

There have been uproars in other states, including Minnesota and Wisconsin, over public lists of companies with workers on various Medicaid programs.

Michigan sidestepped that by declining to name the companies, citing statutory issues of confidentiality, and just assigned identifying numbers to each company.

Lawmakers in some two-dozen states have pushed to create such lists, according to the National Conference of State Legislators, a nonpartisan research group. And Smith said Congress may soon require a similar accounting of companies with employees on taxpayer-funded health care. Massachusetts released a study in early February showing that 138 companies had 42,864 employees and their dependents enrolled in the state's government-paid system, MassHealth, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at [semery@boothnewspapers.com](mailto:semery@boothnewspapers.com).

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## **PLAN SEEKS S.B.T. TAX TO COVER WORKERS' MEDICAID COSTS**

Profitable companies that have 50 or more workers getting health care through Medicaid would be subject to a single business tax assessment to cover the state's cost of providing those services under a plan announced Wednesday by three House Democrats. At stake is about \$75 million the state spends for services to 167,783 working adults whose low incomes make them eligible for Medicaid.

In addition to the working adults on Medicaid out of a total of 641,385, the program provides care to 33,895 children who live in homes with earned income. The statistics do not indicate how many of those on Medicaid are full-time workers and how many hold part-time jobs.

The attention to who is getting care through Medicaid has intensified in light of the steadily growing caseloads: up by 30 percent since 2000 when the state's economic slide began.

Business groups denounced the still-sketchy plan as raising another barrier to economic growth in the state.

The legislation is still in the drafting stage, but would include a profit threshold to determine which companies would be subject to the extra tax and a new database would be required matching Treasury records and Medicaid information from the Department of Community Health. The three bills would also bring the state into compliance with federal proposals.

The legislators said it is unfair that employees of some companies – retail giant Wal-Mart was one they cited – use Medicaid while others like General Motors work to provide affordable health care to their workers.

Rep. Alma Wheeler Smith (R-Salem Township) said, "Michigan taxpayers are being milked for millions of dollars every year by some of the largest and most profitable corporations. This legislation sends a clear message to those businesses that have shirked their responsibility: pay your fair share of employee health care or reimburse Michigan taxpayers for picking up the tab."

She said the proposal would protect Michigan firms that are acting responsibly against competitors that are not providing appropriate health care. "Companies which are providing health care are subsidizing those who are not," she said.

Rep. Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing) likened the approach to an estate recovery proposal backed by Republicans and Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm that recaptures funds from the estate of a person who had been receiving Medicaid services.

Rep. Michael Sak (D-Grand Rapids) added he hoped Republicans could embrace the approach on the basis of fairness.

Granholm spokesperson Liz Boyd said the administration is “certainly sympathetic to the issue. We’re very interested and it’s something we want to take a look at.”

Names of companies that would be targeted are protected under their tax records, but Ms. Whitmer said the proposal would provide for eventually making those names public.

Tricia Kinley of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce said the proposal “simply does not make sense to impose another mandate on business and make it harder for companies to do business in Michigan.” She said most employers do all they can to provide health care, but some cannot do so and others should not necessarily be expected to do so because of other health care options by their employees.

Barry Cargill of the Small Business Association of Michigan dismissed the proposal as not serious. “It penalizes employers who employ seniors and disabled persons who are heavy users of Medicaid. Why penalize employer who gives priority to hiring those individuals?” he said. He added SBAM is concerned about any plan that increases business costs and undercuts attempts to instill more personal responsibility in obtaining health care.

Business groups have long pressed for legislation that would remove health care costs from the taxable base under the SBT, saying the provision penalizes those companies.

Ms. Smith said she is not interested in providing any incentives for companies that are merely doing what they should be doing.

## **Dems Want 'Big Biz' To Pick Up Medicaid Tab**

House Democrats are working on a new bill they say has the potential to return \$75 million misused tax dollars to the state.

In a press conference Wednesday, Rep. Alma Wheeler **[SMITH]** (D-Salem Twp.), Rep. Gretchen **[WHITMER]** (D-East Lansing) and Rep. Michael **[SAK]** (D-Grand Rapids) announced their plan to introduce a three-bill package that is designed go after businesses such as Wal-Mart, that they say abuse Medicaid by not providing their low-wage employees with realistic health care options.

“Multi-billion dollar companies like Wal-Mart have an unfair competitive advantage and are getting rich while Michigan taxpayers pay the bill,” Smith said.

Often times, employers don't offer health care plans or offer health care plans that are so expensive, employees can't possibly meet premiums and co-pays, Sak said.

These employees, roughly 167,000, have no choice but to go on Medicaid, Smith said.

“People say, ‘we love to shop at big box stores’ because they get lower prices, but they don't realize they're getting taxed on the other end,” Smith said.

The other end being the \$75 million taxpayers dole out to pay for Medicaid costs the big boxes should be paying.

Under the new bill, the state would be allowed to tack on an assessment to a company's Single Business Tax (SBT) payment. The assessment would offset costs the state has paid for providing full-time corporate employees with health care.

“Taxing businesses that don't offer health care sends a really negative message,” said Wendy **HOFMEYER** of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. “Why would any business ever want to stay here or relocate? It's a horrible message.”

This bill is another piece of anti-business legislation, Hofmeyer said. Businesses, big or small, have the right to decide if they can and want to provide health care.

“A lot of the big business workforce doesn't demand health care,” Hofmeyer said. “A lot of their workforce is made up of students and minors who are already on their parent's health insurance.”

The bill would only allow the state to look at companies that employ more than 50 people.

Smith was adamant the bill would right a wrong rather than punish big business.

“We're not trying to break companies, we're just asking them to be responsible for what they do,” Smith said.

Using taxes to pay for health care that shouldn't be funded by the state takes money from other state programs such as education, Whitmer said.

Before the bill can move, the Dems said they need to get legislative approval to access data about company wages. They also need to get Republican support.

“Republicans don't have a problem going after Grandma and Grandpa for their last \$5,000 to pay for Medicaid so they shouldn't mind going after corporations making billions of dollars,” Smith said, referring to a comment made by Whitmer.

As it so happens, today more than 30 Washington Democrats sent a letter to Wal-Mart President and CEO Lee **Scott**, asking Wal-Mart to provide quality affordable health care.

They asked Wal-Mart to “set an example” for other businesses and help out with the national health care crisis starting in their backyard.

“At a time when Medicaid is at risk on both the federal and state levels from massive cuts, it's the taxpayers who bear the brunt of providing health insurance when companies like Wal-Mart knowingly shift the responsibility of covering the uninsured to Medicaid,” said U.S. Rep. Bart **STUPAK** (D-Menominee). “We sent this letter to call on Wal-Mart to do the right thing for their workers and help America combat this health care crisis. This is a moral obligation that will make a real impact on the number of uninsured and will relieve the financial burden from taxpayers.”

So is force-feeding health care to businesses the government's decision?

“I would argue that this is not the government's decision,” Hofmeyer said.

# County to gear health program to uninsured

**LaToya Thompson**

*The Enquirer*

June 22, 2005

Leaders at Calhoun County health organizations hope a community-based health plan can help people like Bea Richardson.

Richardson, 59, unexpectedly became uninsured. She said she never foresaw a life without a health insurance plan. Her insurance woes began when she retired from the City of Battle Creek as a bus driver in 1994, she said.

The city continued to offer her employee-sponsored health care for \$188 a month, but after three years, that increased to \$588 per month. Richardson said even though she was self-employed she could no longer afford the payments and discontinued the insurance.

Calhoun County has more than 14,500 uninsured.

Richardson, a Battle Creek resident, was devastated to become one of them.

"I've never been through anything like this before with no insurance and no one can help you," she said. "I have family but they are like me; they are working people just like I am. They weren't in a position to help me."

The Battle Creek resident said she tried numerous times to apply for Medicaid and was denied. In May, Richardson received help from the Family Health Center of Battle Creek, a federally qualified health center that targets uninsured and low-insured persons.

The county-sponsored community-based health plan is designed for low-income individuals and families who are not eligible for mainstream medical assistance programs. The plan could relieve some of the pressure felt by self-employed people, small business owners and working families to obtain and provide health care insurance, said William Burton, director of CareSource, a nonprofit organization that works to increase access to care for people without insurance.

CareSource, in partnership with the Calhoun County Public Health Department and Regional Health Alliance, began looking into starting a countywide health plan in October 2004.

Uninsured, underinsured resources  
There are more than 14,500 uninsured residents in Calhoun County. People without insurance usually wait longer or too late to treat diseases, illnesses and infections, according to health experts.

There are various services available in the county to assist uninsured and low-insured people:

Nursing Clinic of Battle Creek, 34 Green St., 962-6565.

Family Health Center of Battle Creek, 181 W. Emmett St., 966-2600.

Family Health Center of Albion, 115 Market Place, Albion, 517-629-6540.

Fountain Clinic of Marshall, 111 N. Jefferson St., Marshall, 781-0952.

Department of Health and Human Services, 535 E. Emmett St., 965-3247.

For more information on how to cope with being uninsured, visit <http://covertheuninsuredweek.org/statelguides/>

Who can get coverage

Adults with benefits waivers and who have incomes less than 35 percent of the federal poverty level, or from \$9,570 to \$32,390, depending on the number of family members.

Low-income and uninsured persons who are under 65, do not exceed poverty line requirements and who aren't eligible for Medicaid or other public programs.

There is no fee to join but there will be co-pays for some services. Enrollment is based on available funds.

For more information about the Calhoun County health plan, call CareSource at 969-6494.



Since then, a nonprofit corporation and board of directors has been established to monitor and manage the program.

Burton Of the county health plan has the potential to increase access to health care for individuals who don't have insurance coverage.

"In four to six months we can bring in people who are uninsured," Burton said. "When we start seeing those people, then there will be an impact on the number of uninsured in Calhoun County."

The health plan will enroll two groups. It first will address the adult benefits waivers population — individuals with incomes less than 35 percent of the federal poverty level, or from \$9,570 to \$32,390, depending on the number of family members.

The state provides the funding and defines the eligibility requirements. Enrollment will begin Sept. 1.

Then, the organization will begin enrolling low-income and uninsured persons who are under 65, do not exceed poverty line requirements and who aren't eligible for Medicaid or other public programs.

There is no fee to join but there will be minimal co-pays for some health services, Burton said. Enrollment is based on the level of available funds, which are a combination of grant money from the local health department through federal health agencies and a matching funds program from the federal government. For every \$1 spent on an uninsured person, the federal government matches it and adds \$1.30.

Thousands of people in Calhoun County live below the poverty line. Michigan has about 1 million uninsured.

People without health insurance are at a higher risk of death and serious disease because they are less likely to get needed care and typically face difficult financial troubles due to medical bills, health professionals said.

No one is immune from becoming uninsured or underinsured or from paying the cost to treat their health conditions, they said.

"It used to be that people who were middle class thought, 'Oh, I'm never going to have to worry about that,' " Upston said. "But more and more they are because if you get unemployed for a short period of time, you may not have health insurance. With the economy like it is, it's a concern for all of us."

Robert Covert, chief executive officer of Oaklawn Hospital, said the uninsured population affects everyone. In 2001, uninsured Americans received approximately \$35 billion in free health care. Covert said Oaklawn Hospital provides free or discounted care to persons who are uninsured or underinsured but the cost of that care isn't free for others.

He said because of low Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement to the hospital, private insurance companies and their customers end up supplementing the loss.

"In general, the commercial-based patients provide us the income to pay for the uninsured," Covert said. "Without a question, that is one of the factors that drives up health care costs — underpayment by Medicare and Medicaid. As they ratchet down their payments, that forces health care costs even higher for commercial carriers."

According to the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, health insurance premiums in 2004 increased 11.2 percent while workers' earnings increased 2.3 percent.

Jim Hettinger, president and chief executive officer of Battle Creek Unlimited, said many businesses have struggled to continue sponsoring health insurance and have asked employees and retirees to pay more of the costs.

Hettinger said he is committed to providing his employees with health insurance but it becomes more difficult with double-digit premium increases. He said it is harder to recruit employees when the benefit package isn't competitive.

"It's like a conspiracy," he said. "I've asked employees to take on more as far as co-pay and prescription fees."

He said a local solution is helpful but the uninsured problem needs to be addressed nationally.

"It needs a national solution and it needs it in the next three years," Hettinger said. "There are some huge imbalances. There's got to be a solution and it's got to come fairly soon."

*LaToya Thompson covers health issues. She can be reached at 966-0665 or [lathompson@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:lathompson@battlecr.gannett.com).*

Originally published June 22, 2005

# **Baby's fatal injuries don't jibe with dad's story, doctor says**

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, June 23, 2005

By Paul Janczewski [pjanczewski@flintjournal.com](mailto:pjanczewski@flintjournal.com) • 810.766.6333

Andrew L. LaMew told his live-in girlfriend their month-old daughter fell asleep lying on top of him, but she was gurgling and spitting up blood when he awoke.

Sophie Stella Blue LaMew later died, and a pathologist said the father's account doesn't explain the infant's injuries.

Dr. Bernardino Pacris, a forensic pathologist from the Oakland County medical examiner's office, testified in a hearing that the baby died from blunt force trauma to her head and chest. Following the hearing, Central District Judge Larry J. Stecco ordered LaMew to stand trial on charges of felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the April 13 death. Stecco scheduled a July 11 circuit court arraignment for LaMew, 25, who remains free on a \$170,000 cash bond. Pacris said the baby had six broken ribs and a large bruise near the back of her head that was caused when her head struck something very hard.

The pathologist also said that the broken ribs were not caused by resuscitation efforts during CPR because it takes a great deal of force to break an infant's ribs.

LaMew told the baby's mother he may have "squeezed her too hard" when trying to get the baby to breathe.

Attorney Charles Desotelle, representing LaMew, called it a circumstantial case based on factors unknown to the pathologist. He argued that the injuries could have been made during the child's traumatic birth - a Cesarean section in which suction was used to extract the infant - or other health-related issues.

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# Oakland family in trouble over beating

*Teen daughter hurt, son charged; parents could lose rights*

By NIRAJ WARIKOO  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

He was furious.

The 21-year-old Madison Heights resident, a Muslim, had just spotted his 15-year-old sister speaking to a "white, Catholic boy," according to a police statement.

And so, after she got home, Ahmad Abdelmomen beat her up, kicking hard on her back the night of April 29.

Prosecutors said the parents condoned the punishment and didn't take their daughter, Engy Abdelmomen, to a hospital until 8 a.m. April 30. Now,

the couple could lose their parental rights. A hearing is scheduled today in Oakland County Family Court for Adly Abdelmomen and Soher Abdelrahman.

They face a civil charge of abuse and neglect that was filed against them by prosecutors and the county department of human services. Cultural differences may have played a role in the case, prosecutors say; the parents are Muslim immigrants from Egypt.

After the beating, the teenager was "in terrible pain," said Oakland County Assistant

Prosecutor Bob Zivian, who is handling the case. But the police did not know about the case until they were contacted by officials from St. John Hospital.

The girl first told police that she got injured after falling down the stairs, Zivian said.

But later she changed her story and then told police in a written statement that her brother was upset because she was talking to a boy who she described as white and a Catholic.

Now, she is telling some people that the beating didn't happen and that her original story — that she fell down the stairs — is the correct one, Zivian

said. 6/23

Prosecutors say they may work out a plea deal with the parents that would require them to be evaluated by a psychologist, rather than relinquishing custody.

For now, the girl has been placed in another home.

Meanwhile, her brother faces a criminal charge of aggravated assault. He is free on bond; a pretrial hearing is set for July 13.

The family could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Contact NIRAJ WARIKOO at  
248-351-2998 or  
warikoo@freepress.com.

# Daughter's 'intruder' might be her father

**Dear Abby:** I have never written you before, but after reading the letter from the woman who said her 11-year-old daughter "sometimes gets scared at night and thinks she hears voices and someone walking near her room," I had to write. When my younger sister was her age, she, too, would get scared at night and hear people walking/talking outside her room when there weren't. It became so bad she could hardly sleep at night.

Our mother took her to the doctor to be examined, and he discovered her thyroid gland was severely overactive. Once her thyroid hormone was returned to normal levels (not a quick or easy process), her hallucinations stopped and have not returned. Please urge that mother to have her daughter evaluated by a medical professional ASAP to rule out any physical or psychological causes.

— *R.N. in Oklahoma*

**Dear R.N.:** I agree that if the girl's symptoms persist she should be evaluated by a doctor, but not necessarily for the reason you stated. Several readers wrote to point out that the girl, whose father was fanning her fears, may be being molested by him. Read on:

**Dear Abby:** For three years straight, the "technique" described by the mother was identical to the concealment of incest perpetrated by my former husband.

Such behavior is the last thing a wife or mother ever suspects. I was lucky; I walked in on it. I agree that the husband is playing a mind game with his wife and daughter.

I noticed my former husband's absence from our bed and failure to return, and one night I went looking for him. I found him lifting our 12-year-old from her bed while touching her inappropriately. My daughter was whimpering, not fully conscious.



**DEAR ABBY**  
Jeanne Phillips

I wordlessly lifted her from his arms, placed her in bed and remained with her for the rest of the night.

There may, indeed, BE a nighttime intruder, Abby — the husband. Such men, if the child is awake enough, will not hesitate to threaten to kill the mother if the child "tells." Same old script, not much variation.

— *Wiser Now in Hawaii*

**Dear Wiser Now:** Your letter is chilling. Thank you for sharing your experience.

**Dear Abby:** Please tell that woman if her husband insists on scaring her by implying there might be an intruder in the house, to ask him ONCE to do a walk-through to see if the house is secure. If he refuses and says he's going to sleep, tell him OK — that you'll just call the police and tell them your husband said there might be an intruder on the premises and ask THEM to go through the house.

I guarantee the first time she has to do it, it will be the last time he pulls that stunt. What he's doing is a power play. He's trying to control them. But if she takes the ball out of his court, he won't be able to play!

— *A Cop's Sister*

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.*

Thursday, June 23, 2005

## **Strengthen nursing home background checks**

By George Weeks / The Detroit News

About this time last year, a worker in a Muskegon nursing home began a weeks-long pattern of striking the head of an 85-year-old woman who uses a wheelchair, according to witnesses whose reports were investigated by Attorney General Mike Cox.

On Tuesday, Cox announced the arrest of a nurse's aide, Laticia Schevette Brown, 30, whose employer passed on the reports to the state and ended her employment. She was arraigned before Chief Judge Andrew Wierengo of Muskegon's 60th Judicial District Court on one count of patient abuse; released on a \$1,000 personal bond; and will be back in court July 26 for a preliminary examination.

Look for other patient abuse arrests elsewhere in the near future by Cox, who, as a local prosecutor in a previous life, had a 90 percent conviction rate, according to his Michigan Manual biography.

Cox is on an elder care tear that should be hailed by all who have relatives in the residential care system or may themselves be destined to so reside.

His 36-member Health Care Fraud Division, headed by Wallace Hart, has investigated 135 cases, producing 35 criminal filings and the accelerated investigation of many more.

"Michigan's most vulnerable citizens deserve the highest standard of care and anyone who violates that standard will be prosecuted," says Cox, a Republican who previously headed the Wayne County unit that at the time prosecuted about two-thirds of all homicides in Michigan. A year-long study by the Health Care Fraud Division found that almost 10 percent of the employees caring for about 100,000 Michigan vulnerable seniors in nursing homes and adult care facilities have criminal backgrounds.

A sampling of 5,533 patient care workers found 836 outstanding warrants against 482 workers, including those against 85 workers that would bar them from working in patient care under current laws. Cox is pushing for tougher laws.

At the time of the disclosure of those findings, which parallel some of those of a Detroit News investigation last year, Cox vowed to "do everything in my power to safeguard the residents in these facilities from preventable risk."

On the same day as Brown's arrest, a Cox-touted three-bill package was introduced in the Senate to strengthen criminal background statutes for prospective residential care facility employees.

These bills, which seem to be -- and certainly should be -- on a fast track, were introduced by Republican Sens. Patricia Birkholz of Saugatuck Township, Tony Stamas of Midland and Jud Gilbert of Algonac. The package would require Michigan's nearly 5,000 residential care facilities to conduct criminal background checks of all employees -- and to do it annually.

One particularly welcome part of the package would stop allowing workers convicted of "dangerous" crimes before current standards were adopted to remain on the job.

Cox says the Brown case in Muskegon highlights need for the Legislature to pass the criminal background check bills "to prevent this kind of rise to nursing home residents in the future."

Go for it. The accused nurse's aide in Muskegon doesn't have a criminal record and is presumed innocent heading toward trial. But regardless of whether she joins those with criminal records, there should be a better system of screening out those with predatory behavior.

*George Weeks is The News' politics columnist. Reach him at (517) 371-3660 or [gweeks07@aol.com](mailto:gweeks07@aol.com).*

# Stiffer rules for elder caregivers

Thursday, June 23, 2005  
The Grand Rapids Press

No one wants dangerous people caring for their loved ones. By far the majority of long-term care workers don't fall into that category, but the elderly must be protected from the few who do. State lawmakers should support a package of three Senate bills that would identify workers who could pose such a threat. Attorney General Michael Cox is pushing the legislation, based on an investigation by his office that uncovered hundreds of people with criminal pasts working in adult residential care facilities. The bills seek to expand existing laws related to hiring at such facilities. They may well need to be narrowed. Not everyone with a criminal conviction deserves to be barred from employment in a care situation. But, given the vulnerable state of these patients, there must be some restrictions, especially where individuals have records of violent crimes, sexual abuse or theft.

The bills would basically do six things:

Require annual criminal background checks. Currently it's only required at hiring.

Expand background checks to all employees, not just those providing direct care.

Expand crimes covered by the statutes to disqualify not only applicants with past convictions for fraud and theft against vulnerable adults, but convictions for these crimes regardless of the victim's status.

Include convictions for misdemeanor drug offenses, as well as felony convictions.

Eliminate the grandfather clause that prevents nursing homes from firing workers convicted of crimes before more stringent laws took effect.

Make failure to comply with background check requirements a felony punishable by four years in prison and \$50,000 in fines. Non-compliance is now a misdemeanor with no more than 90 days imprisonment or a \$500 fine.

In general, most of these rules seem reasonable. The two recent studies by the attorney general's office revealed almost 10 percent of employees working in all types of adult residential care facilities had criminal backgrounds that include homicide, drug offenses, weapon charges and criminal sexual conduct. Michigan has 40,490 certified nurse's aides (CNA). Of the 5,553 CNA background checks done, 9 percent had a total of 836 outstanding criminal warrants and 170 had past criminal convictions. Ninety-one of the workers had committed crimes that would bar them from employment. A study of four nursing homes including one in West Michigan showed all had staff with outstanding warrants, criminal histories or personal protection.

Tighter rules and stiffer penalties are in order. Sen. Patricia Birkholz, R-Saugatuck, recognized this and sponsored the bill revising the background checks. Ms. Birkholz says the bills take her original legislation a step forward. Effective employee screening protect residents and choose applicants likely to perform a demanding job well. Recruiting and retaining qualified employees is often a struggle but no excuse to bypass background checks. The additional burden is a small price to pay to guard against abuse.

The bills provide an extra level of security. Because the state licenses and inspects long-term care facilities, it is a reasonable expectation that lawmakers ensure the strictest laws are in place to protect residents. Families find it difficult enough to place a loved one in a home. They should not have to worry if appropriate screening was done to ensure the quality of the caregiver hired.

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# Law Backfires, Stranding Orphans in Romania

By ELISABETH ROSENTHAL,  
International Herald Tribune

Published: June 23, 2005

BUCHAREST, Romania - A new law here on the "protection and promotion of the rights of the child" has done little to protect Vasile, a 7-year-old who has lived his whole life in an orphanage in Botosani.

More than two years ago, Becky Hubbell, a pharmaceutical executive from Overland Park, Kan., submitted the required papers to adopt the wide-eyed, dark-haired boy, whom she and her husband had met during medical missions here.

But before that process was completed, the government passed its new child welfare law, which essentially forbids international adoptions. The measure has left hundreds of families without children they had counted as theirs. More important, critics say, the sweeping law leaves thousands of abandoned Romanian children stranded indefinitely in institutions or foster care.

"You have a child in your heart and you've made all the arrangements, and it's clear that child wants a family, too," Ms. Hubbell said. "But for Vasile, time is passing without the stability of a home. And that's harder and harder to make up for."

When, in 2002, officials in Brussels demanded that Romania clean up a chaotic and sometimes corrupt child welfare system as a condition for admission to the European Union, Romanian politicians jumped into action. Law 272, written in collaboration with European Union advisers, aimed to halt decades of mismanagement in just a few years, with edicts that many critics now say were overzealous and impractical.

In response to criticism that orphans were growing up in sterile institutions, the government mandated that no child under 2 could live in one; the new law, it noted, favored reuniting children with biological relatives or placing them in foster care. In response to charges that foreign adoptions were so poorly managed that they sometimes resembled child trafficking, the government declared there would be no more.

Experts applaud the central goal: to encourage Romanian families to stay together and to end the longstanding practice here of abandoning unwanted children. But many child advocates doubt that this poor country, just 15 years removed from a brutal dictatorship, will be able to find good living situations quickly for its huge population of orphaned and abandoned children. Many children currently in orphanages and hospitals, they say, will be stranded.

"There are good impulses behind the law - to provide more assistance to mothers, to keep children out of institutions - and we all felt the system needed more standards," said Gabi Mihaela Comanescu, program director of the ProChild Romania Foundation.

"But there are problems. For example, there are older children who are as adoptable as ever, but there is no one to adopt them now. Also, the law says every abandoned child under 2 should be in foster care, but as far as I know there aren't nearly enough foster homes."



The unintended result is that deserted infants are now passing their precious first years in a hospital ward. There are close to 10,000 children abandoned at hospitals each year in Romania, according to a new study by Unicef, and up to 50,000 children in the care of the state.

Romania's unusual tradition of child abandonment began with a ban on birth control imposed in 1966 by Nicolae Ceausescu, the former dictator, to increase the population. Within a year, women began dropping off unwanted children at state orphanages or hospitals. Their logic was that "the government wanted them, so the government should raise them," according to the Unicef report.

Child abandonment has continued at the same level for 40 years, said Pierre Poupard, head of the Unicef office in Bucharest, even though birth control is widely available in post-Communist Romania. Now, mothers desert babies because they feel they cannot afford to raise them.

Before Law 272 took effect on Jan. 1, politicians from France, Italy and the United States, among others, vigorously lobbied the government to rethink the ban on international adoptions, or at least to allow cases already started to proceed. In January the new Romanian prime minister, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, said he would "not forget foreign families" who had taken steps to adopt Romanian children. To date, however, nothing has been done.

According to the Romanian Adoptions Office, 467 babies were adopted by foreigners in 2002, although a partial moratorium was already in effect. Before that, several hundred Romanian children were adopted annually by families in Italy, France, Israel and the United States, according to adoption groups in those countries. Today the number is zero.

Instead, Romanian county child welfare officials are now required to "reintegrate or integrate the children into their biological or extended families or to place them with a Romanian foster family," said Theodora Bertzi, head of the adoption office.

New families are being trained in foster care to meet the need, she said. Romanian couples (or grandparents living overseas) are being encouraged to adopt unwanted children. Orphanages, called "placement centers," can take children over 2 when no home is available.

Florin Catanescu, 28, grew up in the centers after being abandoned at birth by a schizophrenic mother. Handsome and articulate, he carries his past in one small photo album decorated with a child's glittery stickers. He is skeptical about Law 272, at least in the short term.

"I just don't think the resources are sufficient in our country for this new law, and attitudes will not change that quickly," said Mr. Catanescu, who is starting a nongovernmental organization to help graduates of the centers integrate into society: find jobs, rent apartments, order food in a restaurant. "Children will be stuck - there are still so many families who abandon children."

Because so many of the children are given up for economic reasons, they continue to have contact with their mothers even if they live in orphanages for years, making it hard to define their family status.

Under the old law, if a mother disappeared for more than six months, the child could be put up for adoption. But the new law, with its emphasis on maintaining biological families, stipulates that a mother's right to her child is indefinite, extending through years of separation.

In order for a child to be put up for adoption, the mother must sign a paper formally ending the relationship, which is impossible in cases like Vasile's, in which the mother has long since disappeared. Other relatives have to decline the child as well.

At the Sunbeam Complex of Community Service, a placement center 60 miles from Bucharest, 15 of the 16 children (aged 4 to 9) have had some contact with their biological families. Only one girl, who is 4, is technically adoptable. The tidy two-story house, lying amid dusty fields, is far superior to the huge, impersonal orphanages that made the child welfare system of Communist Romania so notorious.

On a recent afternoon, young residents busied themselves drawing pictures at low tables and playing with blocks. But before Law 272, five children left here each year, adopted by foreign families, said Letitia Stefanescu, the home's director.

The new law "has many good aspects," Ms. Stefanescu said, like offering preventive counseling and financial assistance to young mothers deemed at risk of abandoning babies. But she acknowledged the downside for the children in her care: "International adoptions gave them a chance for a family."

A cute 9-year-old with pigtails, who can only be identified as M.S., said, "I like being here, but I would like more to be with my mom." The girl's mother, who lives nearby, has not visited for several years.

Ms. Stefanescu has faith that the faults of the new system will be dealt with: New programs will encourage or force some mothers to pick up abandoned children; other children will find foster homes. The four-year-old, she hopes, will be adopted by Romanians, even though they traditionally do not adopt older children.

The Unicef report said it was crucial to take steps to prevent future abandonment, like allowing mothers to start rooming with their newborns in order to encourage bonding and prevent desertion.

Becky Hubbell, who spends holidays volunteering at the Botosani orphanage, says it is great that the government is now helping families stay together. But in the meantime, she said, "there are kids like Vasile who have no options but adoption abroad.

"We already provide support for him," she said. "We will be his family, no matter what."



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

## News Release

**Contact:** Stepheni Schlinker or  
Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

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**Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends  
the Family Day Care Home Certificate of Registration of Dana Lee**

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**June 22, 2005**

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing, issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the certificate of registration of Grand Traverse County family day care home provider Dana Lee, 6297 Cherry Blossom, Traverse City, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the child day care family home.

The June 21, 2005 complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and/or day care family home promulgated rules requiring "emergency action" under the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, MCL 24.292(2).

Effective 6:00 p.m., June 22, 2005, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Dana Lee from operating a family day care home at 6297 Cherry Blossom, Traverse City, Michigan or at any other address or location. Accordingly, she may not accept children for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Lee to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her certificate of registration has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care.

On June 22, 2005 Ms. Lee agreed to the revocation of her certificate of registration and waived her right to an administrative appeal.

Ms. Lee has held a certificate of registration to operate a family day care home since January 12, 2001. The certificate of registration was for six children.

Michigan law defines a day care family home “as a private home in which 1 but fewer than 7 minor children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption.”

For more information, consult DHS Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs).

## **COURT: PARENTS MUST PAY DAMAGES CAUSED BY JUVENILE**

If a juvenile is responsible for an offense, his or her parents have to pay restitution for the damages to the victim, the Court of Appeals said in a Tuesday decision.

The specific case involved a 15-year-old who set fire to his school, and the fire and sprinklers caused more than \$700,000 in damages. The school's insurance paid for the damages, and a trial court ordered the boy's parents to pay restitution to the insurance company equaling the amount paid to the school.

The boy's parents appealed with the argument that they should not have to pay because the school was a "non-individual" victim. But, in *SET-SEG v. McEvoy* (COA docket No. 254116) the Court of Appeals upheld the trial court decision to have the parents pay restitution to the insurance company. However, the appeals court disagreed with the amount the family was ordered to pay, saying it constituted "punishment" rather than restitution.

The "court erred to the extent it ordered restitution to" the insurance company, Judge Janet Neff wrote in the opinion. Ms. Neff said the amount of restitution should have been based on the "actual loss sustained by the school" – how much the school was paying the insurance company – instead of the amount the school was compensated by the insurance company. The case was remanded to redetermine the amount for restitution.

Judges Donald Owens and Mark Cavanaugh signed the opinion.



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## News Advisory

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### Committee on Juvenile Justice to Meet

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**June 23, 2005**

The Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice will hold its quarterly meeting Friday, June 24th, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Training Center, 8701 East M-36, in Whitmore Lake.

The agenda includes updates on programs, legislation and facilities as well as subcommittee reports.

The Committee on Juvenile Justice was organized in 1974 as an independent state-level body to provide leadership and policy direction for programs in areas including: aftercare/reintegration services; alternatives to jailing; community-based services; delinquency prevention; gender specific services; juvenile oriented community policing; minority over-representation; and Native American pass through.

The governor appoints committee members. The committee is administratively attached to the Department of Human Services (DHS).

For more information consult the DHS Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)

The Detroit News  
June 23, 2005

## **Detention center seeks book gifts**

The Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility is seeking books for its library. All reading levels are needed, but mostly third- through eighth-grade. The books should interest children ages 9-17, and cannot include graphic sex, violence or profanity. Books on humor, reference books, newer fiction, literature and nonfiction are needed. The library particularly needs stories featuring contemporary black, urban teens. Classic picture books for beginning readers, such as Dr. Seuss and Curious George, and teen fantasy and science fiction, such as Harry Potter, are requested. For information, call Librarian Cynthia Dooley at (313) 967-2132.



Thursday, June 23, 2005

Good deeds: Celebrating unsung heroes

## **Inkster volunteer is dedicated to service**

**AAA recognizes employee for devotion to causes such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Way, Ennis Center.**

By Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

INKSTER -- Toni Bailey enjoys giving more than receiving. Outside of her job, helping customers at AAA Michigan, she volunteers her time in Metro Detroit and asks no thanks in return. Her dedication to service was formally recognized earlier this month when she was awarded the "AAA Ambassador Volunteer of the Year," recognizing involvement in company-organized outreach activities.

"I was surprised," said the Inkster resident, recalling her reaction when she was told she was a recipient.

For years, Bailey has helped raise money for one cause after another, collecting pledges for the United Way to buy car booster seats for poor parents and for the area's Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program.

"I offer my heartfelt congratulations to Toni, who exemplifies this spirit of giving for our entire organization," said Linda M. Woolwine, AAA Michigan president and chief operating officer.

But Bailey's giving heart pushes her to do even more.

For a year, Bailey has been a "big sister" to 11-year-old Tabia Cole of Detroit, taking her roller skating, to lunch and dinners and to the state fair.

"Everyone thinks she's my daughter; they say, 'She looks so much like you!' " Bailey said.

For the last three years, Bailey has rallied her family to serve hot meals at the Salvation Army in downtown Detroit. The trips, where she is joined by her mother, sister, nieces, nephews and godchildren, have become an annual family tradition of giving. "I've been blessed all my life, and I want to help others," she said.

Working through the Ennis Center for Children, Bailey and her family have sponsored families, fulfilling their holiday wish-lists, sending clothes, toys, shoes, and pots and pans.

Her giving has become infectious, drawing co-workers, too, to join together and sponsor families last Christmas.

"I don't need a paycheck for that. Some things you just need to do," Bailey said.

### Contact us

- Send us your good deeds in 150 words or less, and we'll publish them each Thursday.
- E-mail us at [gooddeeds@detnews.com](mailto:gooddeeds@detnews.com).
- Write to The Detroit News, Good Deeds, c/o Metro Desk, 615 W. Lafayette Blvd., Detroit, MI 48226. Please leave a daytime phone number.
- To read past Good Deeds columns, go to [detnews.com/wayne.javascript:comments\(letteradress\)Comment on this story javascript:shareit\(\)Send this story to a friend https://secure.detroitnewspapers.com/circ/cgi-bin/delivery.plx?selectedpaper=detnewsGet Home Delivery](http://detnews.com/wayne.javascript:comments(letteradress)Comment on this story javascript:shareit()Send this story to a friend https://secure.detroitnewspapers.com/circ/cgi-bin/delivery.plx?selectedpaper=detnewsGet Home Delivery)

*You can reach Catherine Jun at (734) 462-2204 or [cjun@detnews.com](mailto:cjun@detnews.com).*

Thursday, June 23, 2005

## **Lorraine Sowerby, St. Clair Shores: Yoga instructor, volunteer for homeless groups in Macomb**

By Amy Lee / The Detroit News

ST. CLAIR SHORES -- Lifelong Metro Detroit resident Lorraine Sowerby embraced the body-and-mind harmony of yoga in the early 1970s, decades before the practice became a trendy pastime.

Mrs. Sowerby practiced and taught yoga until April when she began having health problems. "She loved the mental and physical stimulation, the relaxation as well as the discipline," said her son, David Sowerby of Troy. "She was renowned for her flexibility."

Mrs. Sowerby of St. Clair Shores died of heart failure Wednesday, June 22, 2005, in St. John Hospital and Medical Center in Detroit. She was 80.

Mrs. Sowerby taught yoga through the St. Clair Shores Community Foundation. She was a volunteer for more than 20 years at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit and at St. Gertrude Catholic Church in St. Clair Shores. And she volunteered with groups devoted to helping the homeless in Macomb County.

"My mother would describe herself as a professional volunteer," her son said. "Her passions were her family, her faith, her yoga and her volunteerism."

Mrs. Sowerby graduated from Marygrove College and was a social worker in Detroit for about five years in the early 1940s. She married the late Joseph Sowerby in 1947. He died in 1975.

"My mother always had a very even temper and a great sense of humor," David Sowerby said.

"Maybe the only person who ever got my mother mad was a Republican president or two."

Survivors include four sons, David, Richard, Joe and William; a daughter, Lorraine; and six grandchildren.

Visitation will be held from 5-9 p.m. today and 3-9 p.m. Friday in the Kaul Funeral Home, 28433 Jefferson, St. Clair Shores.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Saturday in St. Gertrude Catholic Church, 28801 Jefferson, St. Clair Shores, with burial in Resurrection Cemetery, Clinton Township.

Memorials may be made to the Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team, 20415 Erin, Roseville, MI 48066.

# Charity Panel Urges Oversight and Accountability Increase

The New York Times

By STEPHANIE STROM

Published: June 23, 2005

Having been asked how to stem financial abuses at charities, a group of nonprofit organizations in a report presented on Wednesday to the Senate Finance Committee called for more money to strengthen government oversight, greater accountability from charities themselves and a number of specific legislative and regulatory changes.

The group, the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector, recommended that no charity receive a tax exemption unless it had at least three board members; that charities be required to state more clearly on their tax forms the components of executive compensation; that tax law be amended to let the Internal Revenue Service share information about nonprofits with state regulators whom donors rely on for information, and that penalties be imposed on appraisers who knowingly overstate the value of property to give the donor a higher tax deduction.

It also suggested that Congress require a minimum distribution from some types of supporting organizations, tax-exempt vehicles created to support a specific charity or charities. These organizations provide wealthy donors with many of the benefits of private foundations with fewer strings, and money in them may languish for years without being deployed for charity. The panel also sought to increase accountability on donor accounts at community funds and investment firms.

"What became clear to us as we went through this process is that no single action will solve any of the problems we've been seeing," said Diana Aviv, the president and chief executive of Independent Sector, the nonprofit trade association that convened the panel at the Senate's request. "It's only when Congress takes action, the I.R.S. does what it needs to do and organizations themselves move to correct problems that we're going to see any improvement."

The panel's report, available at [www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org), will be used by the Senate Finance Committee in drafting legislation expected to be introduced late next month.

Senator Charles E. Grassley, the Iowa Republican who leads the committee, spearheaded legislation last year to limit donors' deductions for used vehicles to the amount received by the charity when it sells the cars and trucks for cash.

From March to May, the nonprofit panel held meetings with charities and foundations in 15 cities, , and the muted tone of some parts of its report reflects the variety of opinions.

Many charities fear that some proposed changes would create new and expensive headaches for them. In April, a coalition of organizations that included advocates for home schooling, Christian groups like Focus on the Family and some conservative foundations sent a letter to Senator Bill Frist, the majority leader, asking him to keep such measures from reaching the Senate floor.

That coalition says better enforcement of existing laws and regulations would be sufficient.

"We're concerned about the burden additional regulation will put on charities and foundations when there's a tremendous need for them as the government increasingly comes under financial

pressure and the needs of society stay the same, or more likely grow," said Dan Peters of the Alliance for Charitable Reform, which signed the letter.

The coalition and the report share a desire to devote more money to oversight. The coalition and many other nonprofit groups would like at least some of the excise tax imposed on foundations' investment income to be used for that.

Proposals that would require more disclosure of donor-advised funds have been contentious.

There has also been opposition to measures intended to match up more closely the deductions claimed by donors of property with the actual value that charities realize from such gifts.

# Supreme Court strikes down Michigan law on poor defendants

6/23/2005, 11:22 a.m. ET

By GINA HOLLAND The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday struck down a Michigan law that barred state-paid legal help for poor defendants who plead guilty but then want to appeal.

The one-of-a-kind law had been challenged by Antonio Dwayne Halbert, who pleaded no contest in 2001 to two child molestation charges and received up to 30 years in prison.

He wanted a state-appointed lawyer to help him contest the way his sentence was calculated.

But Michigan's law, approved by voters in 1994 to clear a backlog of thousands of criminal cases, barred automatic appeals for defendants who plead guilty or no contest. There are some exceptions, including if a prosecutor seeks an appeal. Defendants may ask the Michigan Court of Appeals for permission to appeal, but that request is seldom granted.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing the 6-3 decision, said that Halbert had a constitutional right to an attorney.

"Navigating the appellate process without a lawyer's assistance is a perilous endeavor for a layperson, and well beyond the competence of individuals, like Halbert, who have little education, learning disabilities, and mental impairments," she wrote.

In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas, joined by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justice Antonin Scalia, said, "Today the court confers on defendants convicted by plea a right nowhere to be found in the Constitution or this court's cases."

Thomas said that money would be better spent helping defendants who pleaded innocent and "whose claims are, on average, likely more meritorious."

Halbert, who was accused of sexually assaulting his stepdaughter and another girl, must now be provided with a lawyer to help with his appeal.

Had justices upheld the Michigan law, other states likely would have copied it as a way of cutting back appeals and unclogging

courts. Seventeen states filed arguments supporting Michigan. Opponents argued that the law discriminates against the poor. Justice John Paul Stevens, during arguments in the case, had said that defendants are not always represented at trial by able attorneys.

"If that counsel happens to be incompetent, that's the end of the ball game," Stevens said.

The 17 states supporting Michigan were: Louisiana, Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Washington.

The case is Halbert v. Michigan, 03-10198.

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On the Net:

Supreme Court: <http://www.supremecourtus.gov>

IN BRIEF

The Ann Arbor News

Thursday, June 23, 2005

## **Panhandling in public not barred**

The Ypsilanti City Council revised its begging ordinance Tuesday to exclude its applicaiton in public places after the American Civil Liberties Union objected to the new ordinance, approved two weeks ago.

ACLU representative Paul Sher told the council Tuesday that begging is protected speech. He said solicitation in public places, such as streets and parks, has been considered by the courts as public forums.

The council approved the new ordinance June 7 to give police more tools to address aggressive panhandling, which has been an issue in the downtown retail and entertainment district.

The old ordinance, a single sentence simply stating that begging is unlawful for any person in any public place, was too broad and failed to adequately define begging or specify violations, said city police Capt. Matt Harshberger. It also could have trod on the constitutional rights of residents, he added.

The new ordinance includes 12 provisions prohibiting solicitation in several places, including city parking lots and public buses and from motorists and patrons at outdoor cafes and restaurants. Violation is a misdemeanor with fines up to \$500, or 90 days in jail.

## **Republicans are losing their focus**

For the first time in my 67 years, I am worried about the future of Michigan.

You have all heard of Nero, who fiddled while Rome burned. Well, that is what I am seeing happening with the members of our Legislature. We have very serious problems facing this state, yet they seem to be focused on one thing: trying to make our governor look bad. The election is a year away, but the problems facing this state are now.

The answer the Republican-controlled Legislature came up with to balance the budget is the most heartless I have ever seen. I am sure if it was those lawmakers' special interests that were going to get hurt by their action, it would not have happened.

Instead, it is hurting the disadvantaged adults and children of our state and education, which hands our children a double whammy and, in the long run, hurts the state. It affects many people who just a few years ago were productive citizens paying their way until their jobs went away. What is the Legislature concentrating on? Video violence and attempting to benefit developers by passing a last-minute amendment to legislation as was done by Rep. Chris Ward, R-Brighton Township.

What should our lawmakers ought be doing is trying to find meaningful ways to create jobs for our citizens, passing legislation that will build hope and in the long run reduce violence, and finding ways to pull our cities out of the dumps, because without them, this state is done. No state can exist without viable cities, and we do not have one that is not in trouble.

I do not know why you ran for the jobs you have, but you owe those who voted for you - as well as those who did not - your very best efforts. I, for one, am not seeing the effort.

I see and hear a lot of chest-pounding and grandstanding, but no solutions. For all of the Legislature, let's put all difference aside and focus on one thing: getting this state moving in the right direction. You can all be heroes, and we can be the No. 1 state we use to be.

Sally York  
Brighton